



They're getting off,
they're not getting
on.

Alice Tuppen

Installation/Play 1997

They're getting off, they're not getting on.

A devised time-based installation/play, constructed from an original script written by the artist, based on overheard conversations and observations on a train journey from London to Melton Mowbray.

A durational piece consisting of film, slide projections, sculptural objects, voices within the space and audience immersion.



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The final installation/play comprised of photographed images projected onto the walls of the room. The viewers were encouraged to sit in the space in much the same way as the the actors did before them. The film and sculptural components drawing attention to the parameters of the room, that we are in a box, a confined space, in a sense going nowhere. The three slide projections depict the actors at the same proximity to one another as the audience members newly experiencing each other as they engage with the performance. The soundtrack conveys a scripted conversation based on overheard observations on a train journey, the three projectors changing slides sound like a mechanical train moving. The dialogue that fills the room, also takes the audience beyond the room into imagined spaces, listening, eavesdropping, reflecting, remembering, whilst the close proximity of other viewers in the space reminds the audience of their own self-consciousness as voyeurs. The performers were each recorded and photographed separately and then compiled together to give emphasis through editing, to the dysfunctional content of their conversation. The typical English social politeness of verbally filling the silences in conversation with strangers is emphasised. The convoluted methods of defining identity through exaggeration, or an evasion of describing reality, truths. The barrenness of expression between the intimacy of couples. An awkwardness of silence, space, absence, a verbal or physical battle for control through inferences of speech and possession of objects. The viewer is engaged and implicated in a three-dimensional immersive experience. We are reminded that this is all reconstructed. That the naturalness of a conversation when removed into an empty space, photographed and recorded is stilted. Replayed in that same space as the photographs were made, the actors are no longer substantial but only images projected onto a wall. The audience is now substantial and we bring our own knowledge to the experience of an already re-enacted drama.



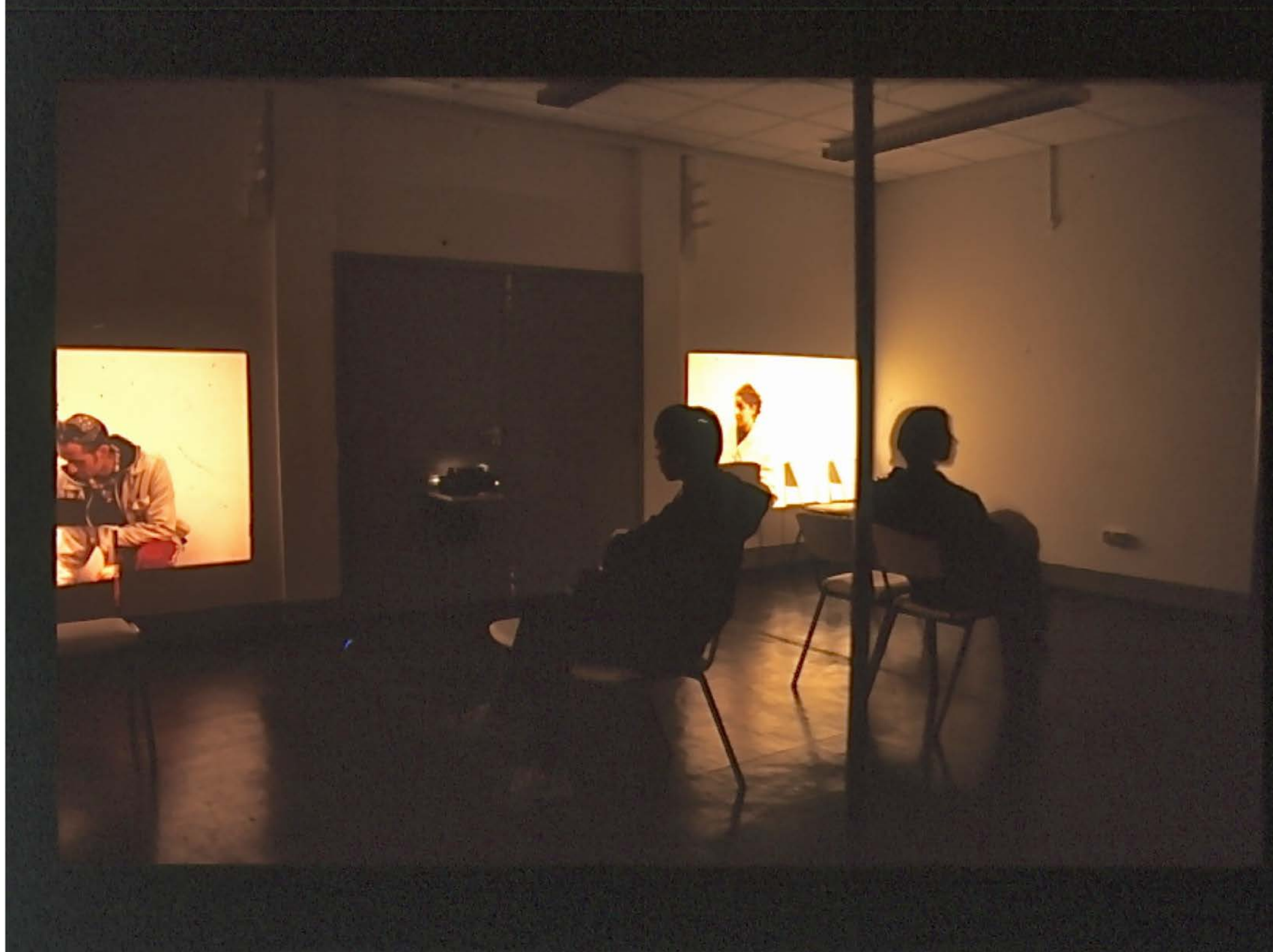
2

Husband

Wife



Woman ³



They're getting off,
they're not getting
on.

The Performers:

Wife - Marcia Farquhar

Husband - Stuart Mayes

Woman - Sarah Lightman

The Artist:

Alice Corps

The Play:

Staging.

On a train, Peterborough station. The doors roll back and forth, conversation can be heard between three people, two women and a man. They are creating a commotion, pushing and shoving bags, sweating and straining, oblivious to all around. They all appear to know each other. The first (Woman) sits down, the other (Wife) bustles ahead to get the best seat, the man (Husband) piles bags onto the overhead racks.

Script:

Husband. Come here, this will do, there's more space here, more room.

Wife. We come from Yarmouth.

Woman. You going on holiday then?

Wife. Yes we're going to Birmingham.

Pause

Wife. I'm 84 and he's 87.

Pause

Does the train stop at every stop?

Staging:

(She projects her address to the train, but mainly to the Woman across from her.)



Woman. Well it stops at this one and the next one, Oakham, Melton Mowbray.

Wife. Oh it does then.

Woman. I come from a nice small place, I always take the train, it's much cheaper. I leave my car in the free car park and then I catch the train.

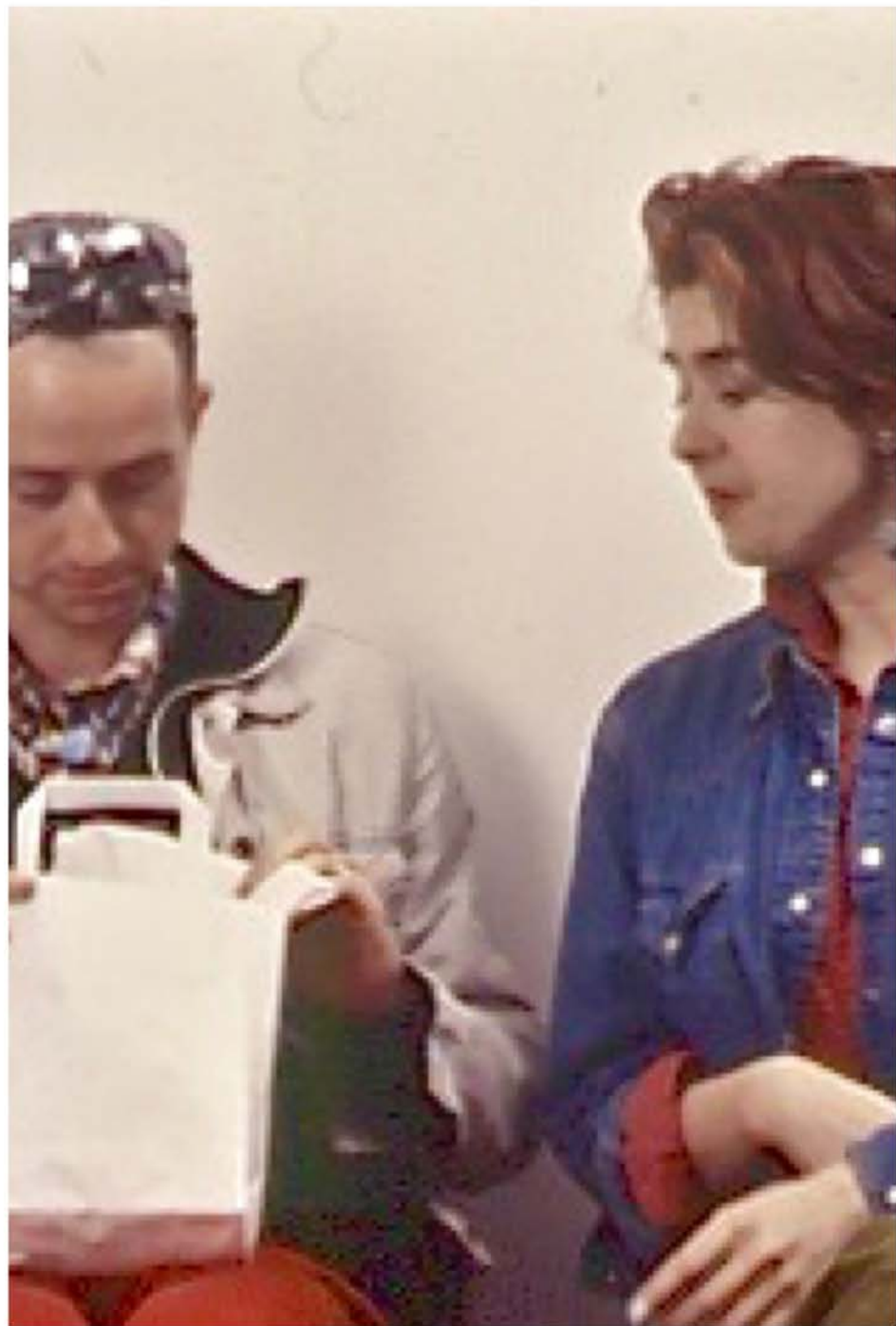
(She directs the conversation towards the Wife who is not listening.)

Silence

Wife. There's some food for you.

Pause I got you some food.

(Husband shuffles in the bag)



Wife. He'll have it when he wants it.

(She talks to the woman as though the husband is not there.)

Pause

I know what he's like.

(Man nods into bag not to her.)

Pause

Wife. You going back here later?

(The train is still sitting at the station)

Woman. No, no I live in a nice place. I always take the train because it's much cheaper. I park my car in the free car park, and I take the train.

Wife. Where you going then?



Wife. Where you going then?

Woman. Been to Peterborough.

Wife. Like the city?

Woman. No nasty place, too many people.

Pause

Had to do some jobs you see. I always take the train it's cheaper - park in the free car park and hop on the train.

(The train starts to move)

Pause



Woman. Won't help you these people – you have to ask.

(A partial conversation can be heard between a Girl and someone called Hamish on the other end of her mobile phone, she talks loudly in front of her girlfriends who sit opposite her. The Girls all sit further down the train, behind the Woman, Wife and Husband)

Pause

Woman. They can see your disabled and all that.

I always have to ask.

(The Wife is silenced for a moment)

Short Silence



Husband. Shall I have the cheese or the tomato one?

Wife. They're the same – ones just got cheese in it though.

Husband. I have the cheese one then.

(He takes them both out of the bag and examines them, they are both the same, he replaces one and selects the other and eats looking out the window.)

Wife. Do you like cheese?

(She speaks to the woman)

Woman. Oh no not me – can't stand it.

Wife. You don't like cheese then.

(She shakes head in disgust muttering into a jumper)



Woman. No.

Pause

Do you like cheese?

Wife. No I don't like cheese, gives me cramp. Can't eat cheese can I?

(She indicates the comment towards her Husband for verification)

Husband. No.

Wife. Can't eat cheese, used to, but now it gives me cramp.

Pause

Makes me feel really bad it does.

(Woman sits nodding)

Long silence



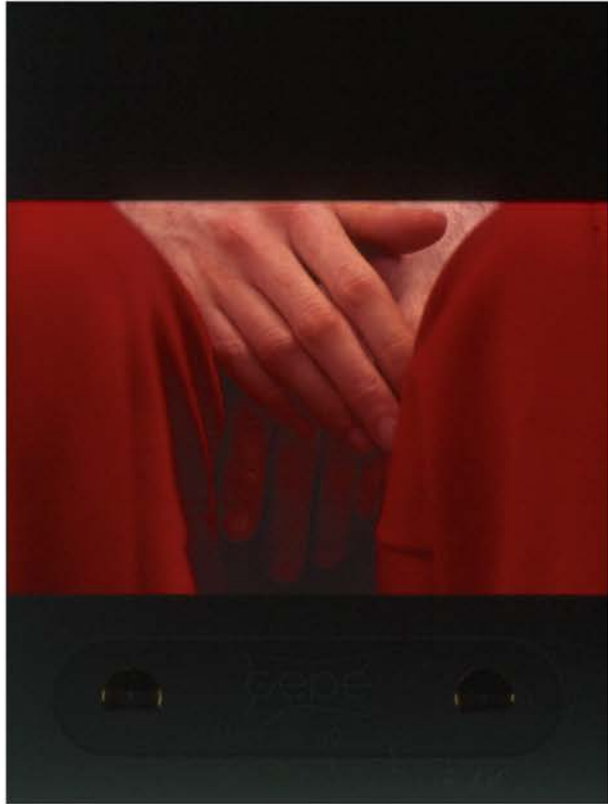
(Camera concentrates on the silence and mannerisms of the people, the Husband continues munching out the window, the Woman shuffles about awkwardly, mouse like, twitching and leaning forward, the Wife sits with a slight fidget in her upper body, head held slightly aloof, fingers rubbing together contemplating the next something to say.)

Wife. Looks as though it's going to rain.

Husband. Yeah.

Woman. Yeah it does.

(Husband and Woman speak simultaneously relieved at a break in the tension)



Wife. We have had it bad haven't we.

Pause

Is it a small place where you live?

Woman. Yes it's very nice – always a lot of tourists – Americans.

(Wife wants to know more, the Woman is secretive and doesn't want to reveal anything exact, she would rather elaborate than tell the truth or exactitudes.)

Wife. Is there, golly, you surprise me.

Short silence

Wife. Hasn't been bad connections have there?

(To Husband.)

Husband. No, no, hasn't.



Wife. Not been bad connections
has there?

(To Woman)

Woman. Hey?

Wife. Not been bad connections
has there.

Woman. Oh...

Wife. Not too bad.

Short silence

Wife. This is a long train isn't it.

Husband. Mm

Wife. Is it a long train?



Husband. It's only two coaches.

Wife. Is it, I never really looked. I was just pleased to see it coming.

Pause

You can put that paper in there.

(Wife indicates to the paper sandwich bag, Husband puts it in.)

Pause

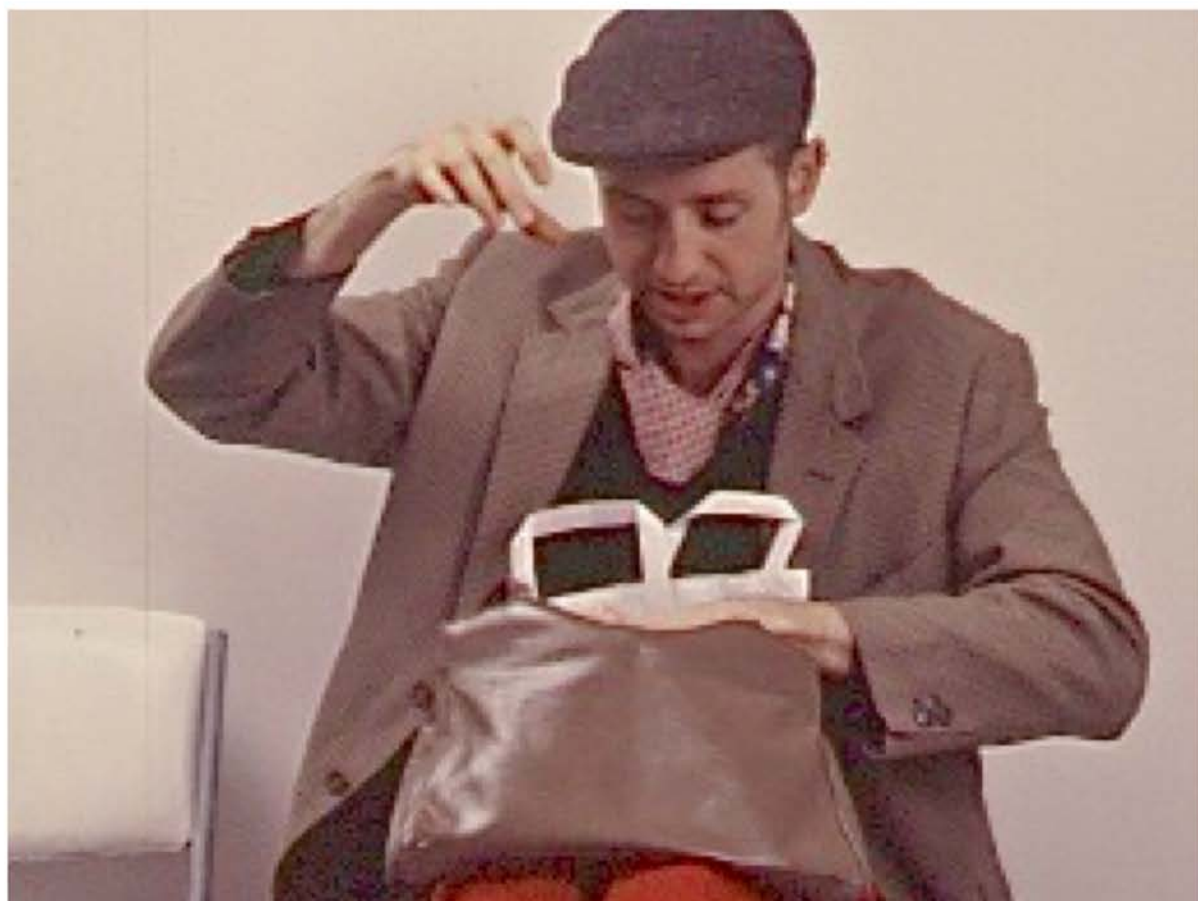
Have the other if you like.

It's not much, have the other.

Short silence

(Husband and Wife sit starring out of the window)

Wife. Seagulls or pigeons?



Husband. Gulls.

Pause

They've just turned the ground over
you see.

Wife. Are they different from
seagulls?

Husband. No.

Short silence

(Husband sits fiddling with his
hanky)

Wife. You got a hanky, put it in their
look.

(Husband folds it up and puts it
down)

Pause

(Husband Looks at watch)



Husband. Half past one.

Wife. What time do you reckon we'll be there? Half two?

Husband. I should think so.

Wife. We must have had the weather set against us.

Husband. Eh?

Wife. We must have had the weather set against us this time.

(Cough from Woman)

Woman. We're here.

Wife. Ah bless you.

(To Woman)



Wife. She's there bless her.

(To Husband)

Husband. Got a line of washing out there?

(Husband's first line of speech to Woman as she's about to leave, directed into his bag.)

Wife. Thank you for your kindness. Bless her.

(As woman is leaving the Wife shouts shouts after her)

Wife. That says Stamford. A pretty little station is, in it.

(No people get on)

Husband. Is, in it.

(Wife gets up and peers out of the window, she adjusts her coat and takes her scarf off.)

Wife. Lovely.



Pause

Wife. They're getting off, they're not getting on.

Husband. No.

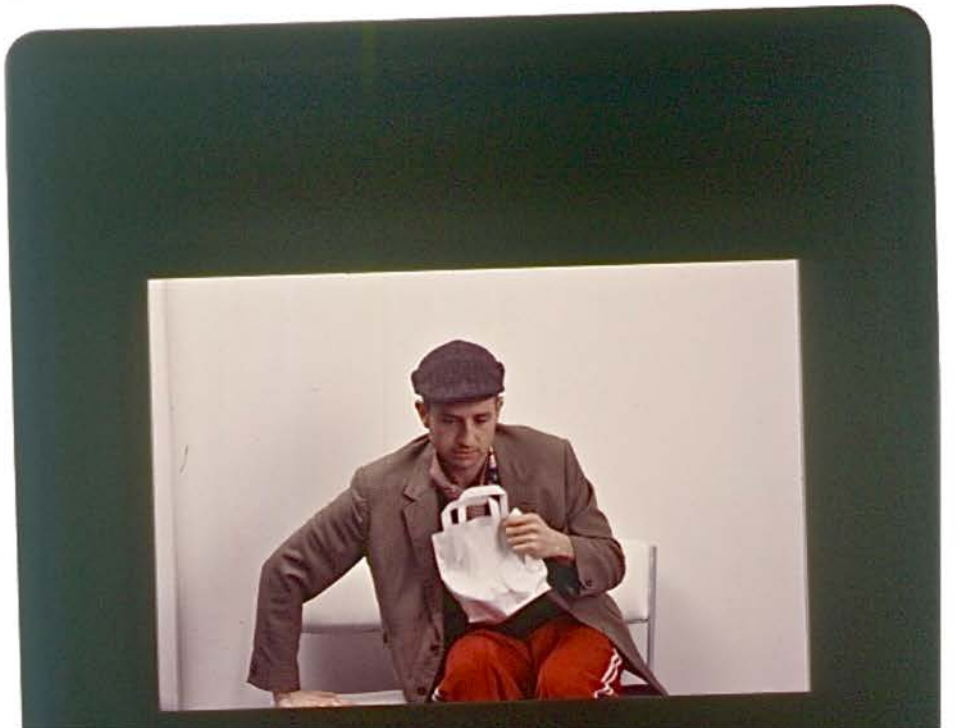
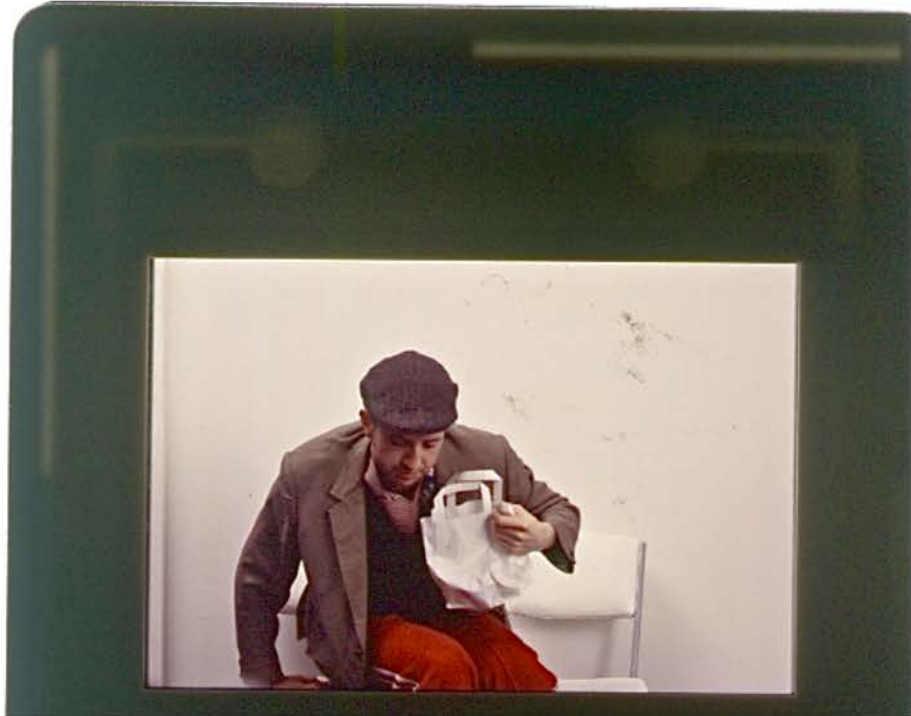
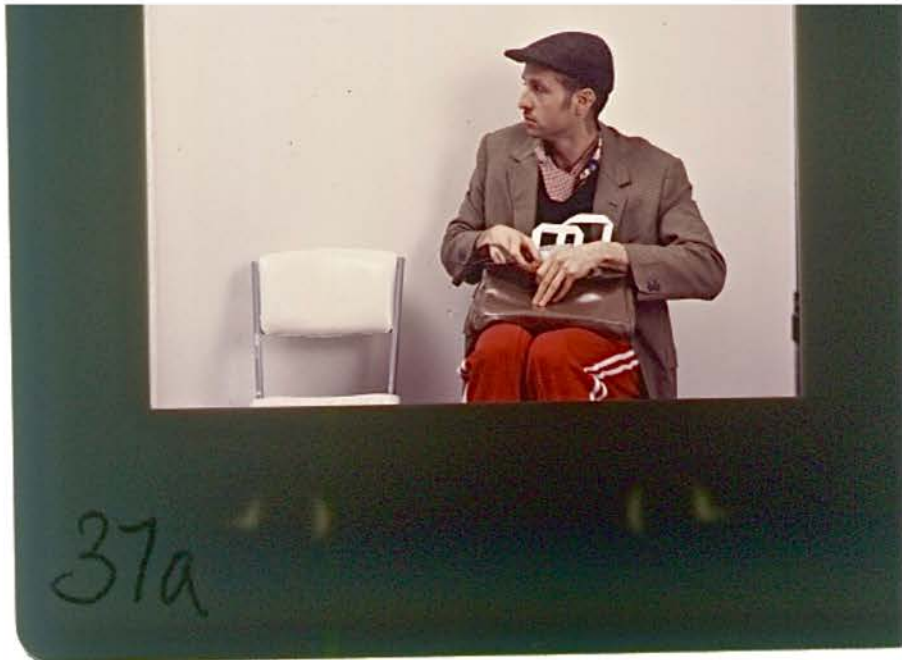
(Wife sits down)

Wife. I think I'll sit in the seat.

(She gets up and moves across to where the Woman sat, she leans across and taps her knee, looking out of the window. The Husband moves his paper sandwich bag to the end of the table, then shuffles up to follow her closer.)

Wife. There's room in it for you?

Pause



Wife. Nobody got on there did they?

Husband. No.

Wife. Nice little station though – in it.

Husband. Yeah.

Pause

(As though switching on for the first time, Husband corrects himself.)

Yes.

Wife. Where did that lady come from, Norwich did she say?

Husband. No Stamford...Norwich – Ely.



Wife. Ely was it?

Husband. Yeah sorry, yes Ely.

Wife. She got on at Ely did she?

Short silence

Wife. Look at the traffic up there.

Husband. Yeah.

Short silence

Wife. Lovely country you know, in it.

Husband. Tis yeah, yeah.

(The train slows and stops completely)



Silence

Wife. Must be one in front I should think?

Husband. No. Signal.

Short silence

(Wife gets up, Husband peers, Wife walks back to the bags)

Husband. Can you manage?

Wife. Yes thank you. When get to Leicester they'll be getting on you see.

(Wife reappears armed with a colossal bag of the square nylon type and sits down with a thump back into her aisle seat, she places the bag in the seat next to her.)



Husband. Yes, I don't blame you.

(Husband gets up as if to follow her example and goes to collect bags in silence. Wife meanwhile adjusts herself, sits awkward and moves the paper sandwich bag across from Husbands table to hers, this all occurs in a long silence)

Long silence

Wife. *It's alright isn't it.*

(Husband returns without bags)

Husband. Yes it's alright.

Pause

Yes.

Wife. Wasn't too bad though.



Pause

Wife. We haven't got much though.

Husband. What did you think to them?

Wife. They're very nice – very nice yeah.

Pause

Look at them Nanny, they're running way up to some mischief.

Long silence

(Husband creeping out of his shell now that the Woman has gone, asks the Wife his first question, he is referring to the sandwiches which she hasn't touched.)

(Wife speaking to Husband addressing him by his name for the first time, is referring to the mobile phone Girls from earlier. They both look out the window)



Long silence

Husband. Three weeks from now
an we'll be going the other way.

Short silence

Wife. I told you didn't I.

Pause

I said to you they've been giving
each other messages. Because
they got mobile 'phones now, can't
catch them.

Pause

(The train starts to move again, over
the tannoy comes an
announcement that they are sorry
for the delay to this midland bound
service, but that was due to
vandals on the line).



Wife. I think we've done well
haven't we.

Husband. Next stop Birmingham,
no two, no one...first stop Norwich,
second stop Stamford...

(He begins to recall the stops
they've already passed through)

Short silence

Wife. They got on the phone to the
police you see – I said when I saw
them running, didn't I.

(Wife folds her scarf up and puts it
on the table beside her)

Long silence

Pause

(Wife picks up scarf and places it
on her knee)



Pause

(Wife's scarf falls off her knee onto the floor, Husband picks it up for her and puts it on her knee)

Wife. What time did you say we arrived? Two something?

(Husband unfolds a piece of paper and looks at it)

Wife. Is that paper right - let me see?

(She reaches for it, Husband hastily puts it back in his pocket, Wife withdraws her hand)



(Husband rearranges himself and takes out another piece of paper looks at it, a timetable)

Husband. Twenty minutes to three.

Wife. It's late in it.

Husband. Yeah.

(He continues looking at the paper)

Long silence

(The train stops at Oakham, lots of people get on)

Very long silence

(The Husband and Wife sit in silence, they're too many people)



Wife. Lovely now.

Husband. Tis isn't it.

Pause

Clear.

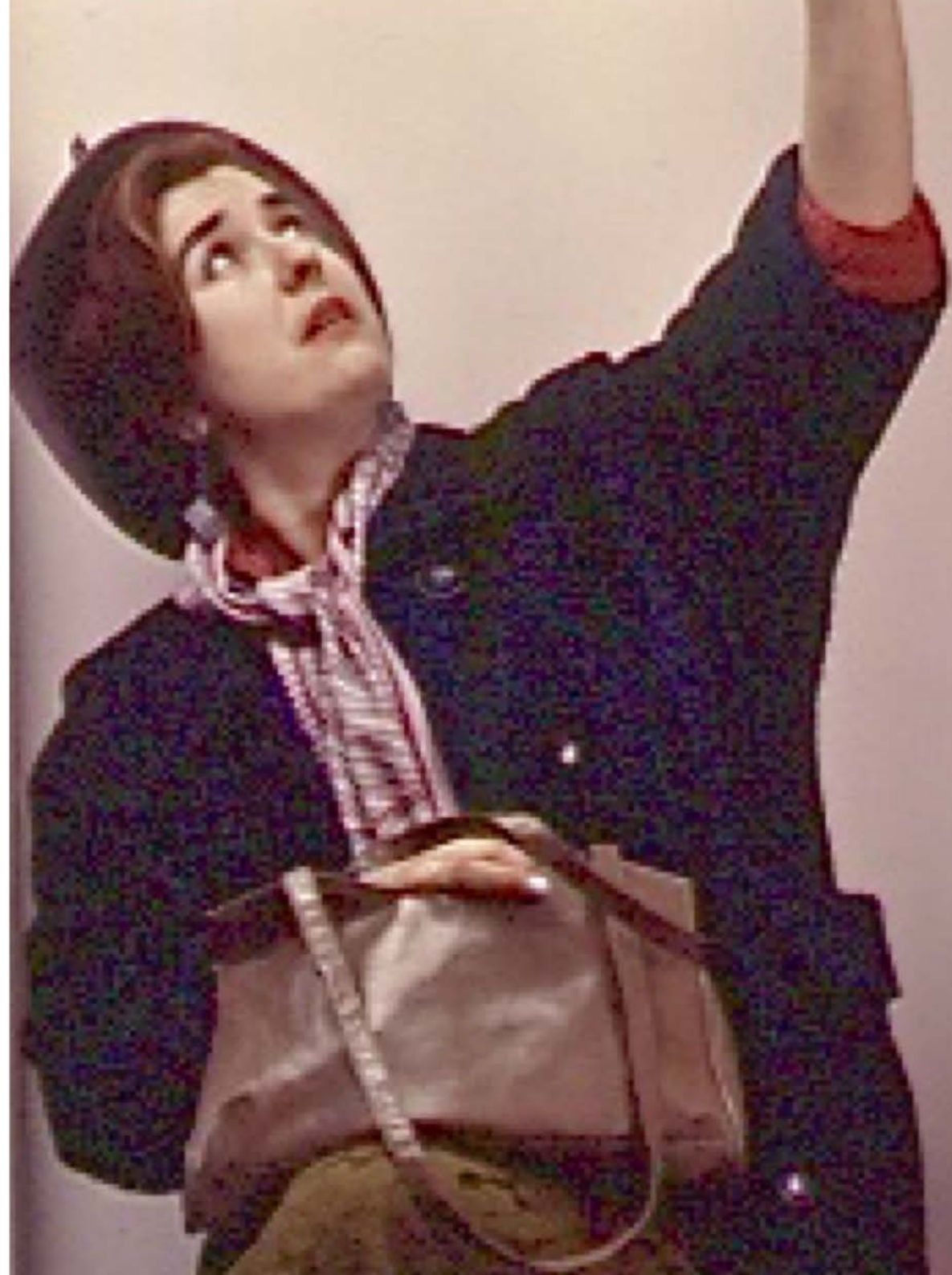
Long silence

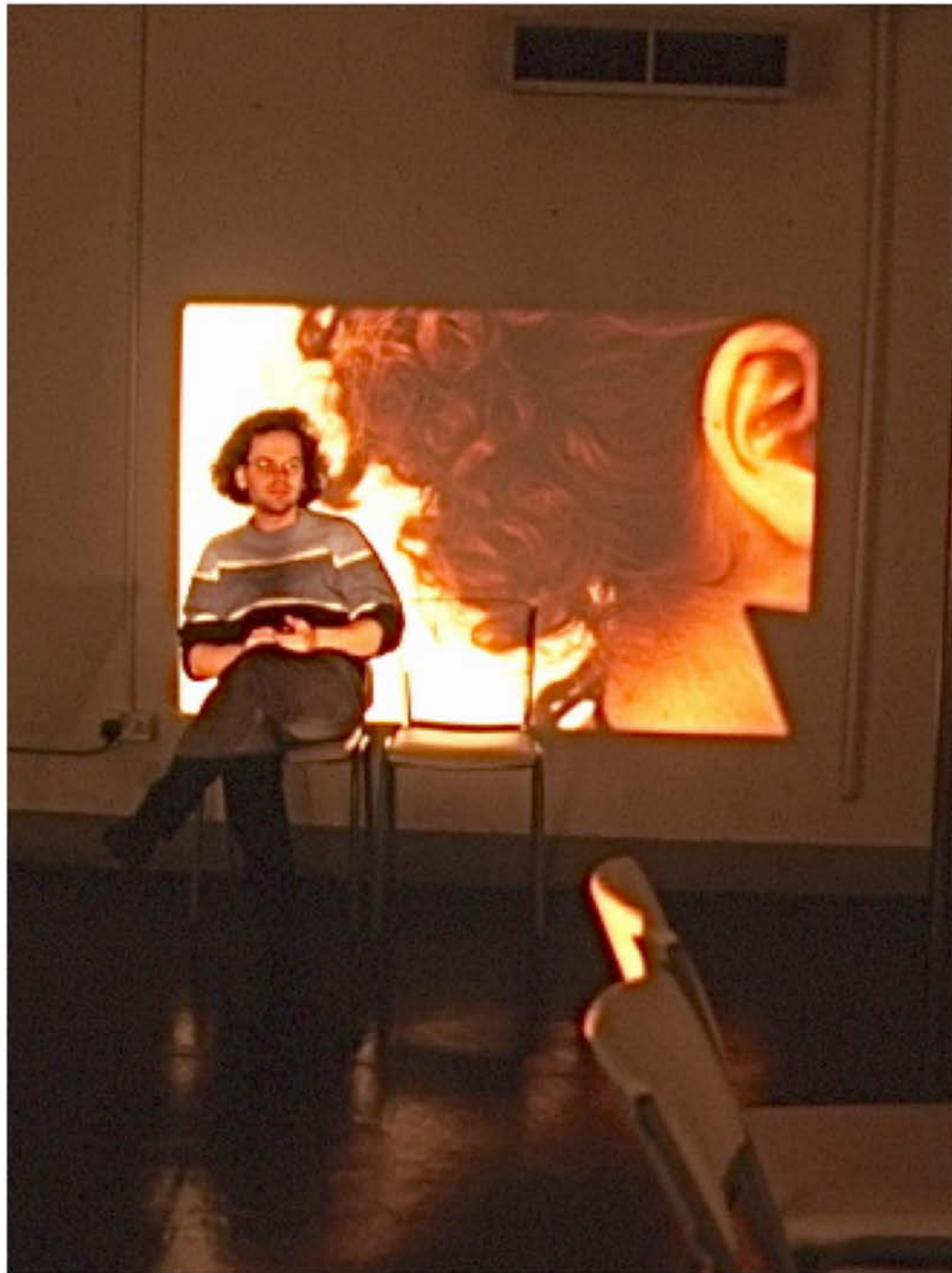
(The train pulls into Melton Mowbray. As a passenger gets off the husband gets up to fiddle with the bags)

Husband. Just checking them.

Wife. They're alright in't they?

END.









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A l i c e T u p p e n